DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 653 EC 231 838

AUTHOR Reisman, Elaine S.
TITLE Guidelines for Supervising People with Moderate Special Needs in the Work Place.
PUB DATE May 90
NOTE 20p.; For a related document, see EC 231 837.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Programs; *Job Training; *Learning Disabilities; Personnel Management; *Supervision; *Supervisory Methods; *Supported Employment; Vocational Adjustment

ABSTRACT

These guidelines developed out of a study identifying support systems for supervisors of people with moderate special needs (MSN) in training internships and employment situations. Generally MSNs are dependable, loyal employees who are eager to please and to do a good job. Problems occur because the MSNs are insecure about their role at work, have low self-esteem and doubt their capacity to live up to others' expectations. For some MSNs, distractibility and having a short attention span are major problems. Strategies for supervision of MSN staff are discussed in two sections: general techniques, such as welcoming techniques, for working with MSNs across time, and specific strategies for handling problem behaviors ranging from shyness to poor judgement regarding safety issues. (PB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED322653

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISING PEOPLE WITH MODERATE SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE WORK PLACE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Elaine S. Reisman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Elaine S. Reisman
Assistant Professor
Threshold Program
Lesley College
Cambridge, MA 02138

May 1990

EC 231838

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

DEFINITION OF THE MODERATE SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATION 1

SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE GUIDELINES 2

JOB PERFORMANCE OF MSNS 3

STRATEGIES FOR THE SUPERVISION OF MSNS 5

1. General techniques for working with MSNs across time 6
   - A. Preparations supervisor should make before MSN starts to work 6
   - B. Welcoming techniques for beginning the work experience 7
   - C. On-going supervisory techniques 7
   - D. Strategies to use in supervisory conferences 9
2. Specific problem behaviors and strategies for handling them 10
   - A. Insecurity about role on the job and low self-esteem 10
   - B. Memory problems and inability to follow directions 11
   - C. Distractibility and short attention span 11
   - D. Inability to transfer learning 11
   - E. Reluctance to ask for information or for help 12
   - F. Lack of initiative 12
   - G. Perseveration and impulsivity 12
   - H. Lack of social skills (shyness) 13
   - I. Behaving as a service recipient rather than a service provider 13
   - J. Poor judgment in regard to safety issues 14

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION OF MSNS 14

1. Qualities of the on site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the MSN 14
2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on site supervisor 15

CONCLUSION 16

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 17

INTRODUCTION

This guidebook was developed as an outcome of a research study I conducted in Spring 1990 during a sabbatical leave from the Threshold Program at Lesley College, Cambridge, MA. The purpose of the study [1] was to identify support systems for supervisors of people with moderate special needs (MSN) in training internships and employment situations. Work related issues and techniques of support which enable supervisors to work more effectively with MSN trainees and employees were evaluated.

Public awareness of the special needs of some members of society has increased in recent years. Changes have been made to accommodate the more obvious needs, i.e., ramps, special toilet facilities, etc. However, there are needs which cause difficulties in daily living tasks and at the work place which are not so widely recognized. These are the needs of people who appear no different from others in the general population, but who have cognitive or social deficits. This population, whose needs, for the most part are "hidden", are designated moderate special needs (MSN) for purposes of this guidebook.

Need for guidelines in the supervision of the MSN population was expressed by many respondents in the research study. While there is a body of supervisory literature geared to preparing the general population for work in the human services or in the corporate world, very little has been written about the supervision of people with moderate special needs in the work place.

DEFINITION OF THE MODERATE SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATION

Typically, MSNs cannot be singled out from others in the general population by their physical appearance. They are a heterogeneous population characterized by low average intelligence, with poor reading and/or math skills, difficulty with verbal and/or written communication, inability to abstract and generalize, and social immaturity. Some other characteristics which occur in this population are short attention span, distractibility, information processing deficits, memory problems, perserveration, and inappropriate social responses. Any one individual can demonstrate a scatter of abilities and levels of functioning. It is possible for an MSN to have excellent social skills, but be low in cognitive abilities.

---

[1] Elaine S. Reisman, (1990) "A Study of Support Systems and Supervisory Techniques Used in the Training and Employment of People with Moderate Special Needs", Lesley College/Threshold Program, Cambridge, MA

People with moderate special needs function on a level lower than the general population but higher than those who are retarded. Because their deficits are not so visible, indeed, may be called "hidden", they are often expected to function at a level higher than their skills would warrant. In large measure this population operates in the mainstream of society, but has cognitive and/or social deficits which may cause problems in daily living and on the job. Their adjustment to the general society and to independent living is problematic for themselves and their families.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines were developed based on information from two main sources:

(1) Supervisory Experience: I have worked for eight years at the Threshold Program supervising students with moderate special needs and supporting the supervisory work of staff members of cooperating agencies providing field placements.

The Threshold Program is a two year program for learning disabled young adults in the low-average intellectual range. Located on a college campus, the program strives to prepare young adults (ages 18-24) for independent living through an academic and vocational curriculum based on a hands-on approach. Students divide their time between specially designed campus based courses and vocational experiences supervised by Threshold faculty and on site supervisors working in community agencies. Students may choose to prepare for work with young children in early childhood settings or with adults in such settings as nursing homes or geriatric day centers. An optional third year program is geared to aid students as they make the transition to greater independence in paid work experiences and living on their own.

(2) Research Study: The vocational faculty of the Threshold Program perceived a need for further clarification of supervisory issues and the development of guidelines which would be helpful in supporting the work of the on site field supervisors in human service agencies with whom we co-operate. It was presumed that employers in business and industry would also find such guidelines helpful. Thus I conducted a research project to identify on-the-job problems for the moderate special needs population and techniques used by the field supervisors to address these problems.

Questionnaires were sent to Threshold cooperating supervisors and employers of Threshold graduates, mostly in the human service professions. Interviews were conducted with employers and supervisors (not connected with Threshold) in business and industry. A total of 65 completed questionnaires and 26 personal interviews, plus a review of the literature, form the basis of the

findings of the study. Results of this study identified problems MSNs experience at work and techniques which could be useful to supervisors in helping MSNs to improve their job performance. (Further details on the research methodology are available in the research report; all further references to "research" refer to Reisman, 1990).[2]

JOB PERFORMANCE OF MSNS

MSNs are dependable, loyal employees who can be counted on to be at work on time. They are eager to please and to do a good job. Some of them like to do jobs that are repetitive. Because of the uncertainty about their abilities, the MSNs are receptive to directions from supervisors in addressing their job responsibilities. In a similar vein they can constructively handle criticism about their work performance, particularly if the supervisor takes the time to explain what is expected and shows respect for the person with moderate special needs.

Problems occur on the job because MSNs are insecure about their role at work. They have low self-esteem and question whether they have the capacity to fulfill expectations others have of them, and/or whether they can be of importance to the organization. Even with clear explanations and reassurance from supervisors, they often present problems because of their low self concept.

Their insecurity prevents them from asking questions about their role and specific tasks. In the face of uncertainty, the typical response is avoidance -- to retreat rather than to ask for help or redirection. They feel unworthy or "stupid" and fear that if they are more assertive, their ignorance will show and might cause the loss of their job.

Following directions is difficult for MSNs. Often this is seen as a memory problem. Another perspective on the inability to follow directions is that MSNs may hear or read directions, but do not process them. There appears to be a gap between what they hear or read and their capacity to act upon this information. Frequently, MSNs say that they have trouble remembering, when perhaps they have not understood in the first place.

For some MSNs, distractibility and having a short attention span are major problems. External noise or competing activity exacerbates this tendency and takes their attention away from the task at hand. Expecting them to focus for too long a time tests the limits of their attention span. Fidgeting, moving around and then, perhaps returning to the task, is a typical sequence for those who are easily distracted.

---

[2] Reisman, Elaine S. (1990) Ibid.

Perseveration manifests itself as a problem for MSNs who are apt to repeat over and over again the same piece of information or to have a personal agenda which dominates their conversation or actions. This coupled with an inability to read verbal and non-verbal cues leads to inappropriate behaviors such as impulsively interrupting conversations.

MSNs have difficulty generalizing from one situation to another; they tend to be rigid. Even when they have been given sanction to be flexible, it is hard for them to make a judgment which veers from the rule. In the human service fields, especially, this rigidity is problematic because the behavior of children and clients is less predictable than the tasks that are more typical in business or industry. Exercising good judgment when working with people in the human service setting is particularly important as it applies to issues of health and safety. Part of the job responsibility in the human services is making sure that the children and clients are well cared for.

Judgments in regard to their own personal health is also an issue for MSNs. In their zeal to do well on the job, they are apt to come to work when ill, jeopardizing their own health and that of others in the work place.

In some respects, the lack of good judgment is a reflection of their immaturity and dependency needs. When working in human service agencies, some MSNs identify more as service recipients than as service providers. For example, some MSNs have been observed to participate in activities as though they were children rather than the adult responsible for the care of the children.

A number of characteristics of MSNs have been identified which present problems in job performance: poor self image, insecurity, distractibility, short attention span, impulsivity, perseveration, rigidity, immaturity, poor judgment and limited social skills. This may appear as a daunting list of deficits, as it relates to the MSNs potential performance in a work situation. But, it is only as one begins with an understanding of moderate special needs that it is possible to define guidelines which will result in viable employment experiences for this population. Several principles emerge which underlie the supervisory strategies which follow. These principles are:

1. **Proper job placement is the first step to successful employment:** Job placement needs careful consideration for MSNs. Characteristically there is a scatter in their abilities. A person with moderate special needs could be strong in one area and weak in others, but because her/his deficits are not immediately obvious, s/he is often expected to function at a level higher than his/her capabilities warrant. Thus, s/he experiences frustration and disappointment. More appropriate assignments can take place if the employer and/or supervisor are aware of the particular strengths and weaknesses of the individual.

2. **The supervisor should be committed to training and hiring MSNs for the work force:** The supervisor is a key ingredient in successful employment of MSNs. Not all supervisors or department heads are suited for this role. People deciding to supervise MSNs need the conviction that MSNs can be integrated into the work force and can be valuable employees.

3. **Specialized supervisory skills are needed:** Many of the same techniques used to supervise people with moderate special needs are used for the general population. However, some techniques are used more frequently with MSNs and are applied differently. A fuller discussion follows in the section outlining strategies.

4. **Deficits can be converted into assets:** For example, perseveration which on one level is problematic to co-workers and supervisors, on another level can be beneficial to the enterprise when an MSN is placed in an appropriate job assignment. Repetitive tasks which might be tedious for someone else, often times is the appropriate placement for someone who perseverates.

STRATEGIES FOR THE SUPERVISION OF MSNS

The supervisory strategies in this guidebook focus on social/behavioral issues rather than on deficits in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math. This is not to imply that those areas are less of a problem for MSNs; however, there is an extensive literature addressing remediation in those areas. [3,4] Guidelines for addressing social/behavioral issues on the job are less prevalent, so priority is given to outlining supervisory strategies for handling those problems.

The guidelines are divided into two sections:

1. General techniques for working with MSNs across time.

2. Specific problem behaviors and strategies for handling them.

---

[3] Houck, Cherry K. (1984) LD: Understanding Concepts, Characteristics, Issues Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, NJ

[4] Lerner, Janet W. (1985) LD Theories, Diagnosis & Teaching Strategies 4th Edition Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston

1. General techniques for working with MSNs across time.[5]

A. **Preparations supervisor should make before MSN starts to work:**

1. Try to learn as much as possible about learning disabilities and other characteristics of people with moderate special needs.

2. Get as much information as possible about the person to be supervised from the referring agency, former teachers or employers and the person him/herself.

3. Meet with the individual. Ask him/her to identify his/her:

   a. abilities, limitations and special needs
   b. coping strategies
   c. concept of the job
   d. goals and aspirations
   e. experience in work situations
   f. interests and hobbies

   (Some MSNs will be able to come forth with all or most of the information; others will need prodding and may not be able to come forth with much information).

4. Explain beginning expectations. Tell the MSN what can be expected from you. Try to relate your expectations to what the person has told you about him/herself. Reassure the person that every one has some apprehension about starting a new experience. Let him/her know that you are ready to make changes in expectations when necessary.

5. Set up a regular time to meet. Explain that this time is set aside to give both of you the opportunity to plan work together and to practice some work skills which need reinforcing. Job successes and necessary modifications in tasks and behaviors can be discussed in this regularly scheduled meeting time. The meeting time offers a less threatening atmosphere for on-going evaluation than conferences called when problems arise.

---

[5] Thanks to Fran Osten, Supervisor of Early Childhood Field Placements, Threshold, for the organization of this section.

B. **Welcoming techniques for beginning the work experience:**

MSNs often feel unsure that they are really wanted at the job site even when they are hired with full knowledge of their disabilities. Low self-esteem makes them question their worth to the job situation. To help MSNs to handle this initial apprehension (which is also not uncommon in the general population) the following techniques can be helpful:

1. Welcome the MSN by introducing him/her in the agency or company news bulletin.

2. Put the MSN's name on the list of staff or employees of the firm where ever this is done for others.

3. Personally introduce the MSN to staff, employees, clients or others in the environment.

4. Make getting acquainted easier for the MSN by giving him/her a list of the names of other employees, children or clients with whom s/he will be working. In a day care or human service agency, put name tags on the children or clients.

5. Meet the MSN's basic needs: designate a place to put personal belongings; point out toilet and eating facilities; include him/her in lunch with other staff if at all possible.

6. Explain rules of the work place: clarify procedures for absence, tardiness, emergencies. Give him/her a written list of the rules.

7. Make available a calendar of events relevant to the job.

8. Explain, write out and post any pertinent routines or schedules.

9. Write out specific job responsibilities expected of the MSN. Post the list in a place that is easily accessible.

10. Show the MSN where supplies are kept.

C. **On-going supervisory techniques:**

1. Break tasks down into specific small steps. Give directions both orally and in writing. Show the MSN how to do the task. Ask the person to do the task in front of you.

2. Limit directions to one at a time until you see evidence that the MSN can function with greater autonomy. In any case, have the person repeat the direction to you to be sure that s/he understood.

3. Encourage the MSN to ask questions for clarification of tasks or for other information.

4. Encourage the MSN to tell you when things are difficult, when s/he is uncomfortable about a job expectation and/or when there is a problem with co-workers.

5. Speak clearly. Be aware of your tone of voice and body posture. Try to make requests and suggestions rather than commands.

6. Give immediate feedback as problems arise. Avoid letting minor issues accumulate into major problems.

7. Remember to praise even small improvements in performance or behavior.

8. In redirecting or giving critical feedback, try to start with a positive statement before suggesting a change in the job behavior, whether for a specific job task or for a social skill.

9. Keep expectations realistic: periodically remind yourself to re-assess expectations. Be careful about under-estimating abilities as well as over-estimating them

10. Do some "detective work" to ascertain whether a problem which has occurred may be attributable to characteristic behavior of people with moderate special needs, whether the expectations are too high or too low for this individual, or whether you as the supervisor are losing patience or perspective.

11. Be patient: MSNs need much repetition and time to process information.

12. Whenever possible, anticipate and prepare MSNs for changes which are likely to occur in routines or schedules.

13. Include MSNs in meetings even if you think that they may not comprehend the content of the meeting. Similarly, invite them to social events so that they feel a part of the organization.

14. Show an interest in the MSN's personal life, but be cautious about getting too involved. A friendly interest is enough. Many MSNs are "hungry" for personal relationships and are not aware of appropriate boundaries. You may have to set limits both for the MSN's sake as well as your own.

Remember: supervising MSNs demands time, patience, repetition and compassion. In general, be honest, specific, respectful, and give lots of kudos.

D. **Strategies to use in supervisory conferences:**

1. Designate a regular time for a minimum of fifteen uninterrupted minutes each week to talk with the supervisee.

2. Encourage the person to keep a journal or notebook in which to jot things down that s/he wants to discuss with you at your regular meetings.

3. Encourage the use of the journal as a way to self-evaluate. Suggest that entries might include something s/he did at work that s/he feels good about or something s/he wants to work on.

4. Suggest that s/he use the journal also to describe something that happened at work which s/he wants to discuss, or to write ways in which you could be helpful.

5. Invite ideas and try to use them. Sometimes MSNs are able to suggest different ways that you can supervise or give instructions which are more compatible with their style of learning.

6. Role play situations which have occurred. If possible, tape or video the role play. This technique often helps to dramatize a point you want to make and affords the opportunity to discuss issues.

7. In some situations the use of a mirror to practice communication skills is also helpful. This technique aids the MSN to understand better how s/he presents her/himself.

8. Practice a job skill or behavioral change in the supervisory conference i.e., limiting an acting out child, starting a conversation, etc. Practice within the supportive supervisory relationship,

detached from the more stressful work situation, makes learning new behaviors easier.

9. Establish goals for job skills and behavioral changes; measure progress toward goals; and set new ones. Break down long term goals into smaller achievable steps.

10. Be realistic in discussing skills and deficits. Be prepared with suggestions for strategies to cope with problem areas. For example: for an MSN who has a reversal problem, putting shoes on the correct feet of a child may be difficult. Suggest that the MSN sit behind the child, line up the shoes next to the correct feet and then go in front to put them on. By seeing the shoes from the perspective the MSN is accustomed to, s/he does not have to deal with the issue of reversal.

2. Specific Problem Behaviors and Strategies for Handling Them

This section identifies specific problem behaviors and suggests strategies for handling them. The core strategies are repeated for some problems because they are particularly useful in coping with the behavior. Some techniques are suitable to use for a variety of problems; thus, in some instances problems are grouped together.

A. Insecurity about role on the job and low self-esteem

1. Welcome and orient the MSN to the job using the techniques suggested for beginning the relationship.

2. Plan tasks that are meaningful and allow the MSN to experience success, thereby enhancing his or her sense of worth.

3. Look for opportunities to give positive reinforcement for even small steps in improvement. Be specific about what you are praising. In addition to saying "You are doing a good job", say, "I really appreciated that you remembered to put paper towels in the bathroom today when we ran out."

4. When suggesting changes in behavior, use the "sandwich technique"[6]. Start with a positive, explain the criticism, and give a specific suggestion for a way to improve the behavior.

---

[6] Thanks to Arlyn Roffman, Director of the Threshold Program, for this technique.

B. **Memory problems and inability to follow directions:**

1. When giving directions, check to make sure that the person is looking at you or at what you are demonstrating so as to assure s/he is focusing on the instructions.

2. Give step by step instructions both orally and in writing.

3. Ask the person to repeat the instructions to you or demonstrate the task while you watch. Encourage questions.

4. Be specific in giving directions: i.e. "wipe all three tables in this room with the sponge that is on the sink in the kitchen."

5. Give only as many directions as the MSN can handle at any one time.

6. Use a check list of written directions so that the MSN can self monitor by checking off when tasks are done.

7. To aid memory, suggest key phrases or mnemonic associations.

C. **Distractibility and short attention span:**

1. Assign job tasks that allow for movement. If that is not possible, suggest that the person take a stretch or short walk after working a set amount of time.

2. Try to assign tasks that can be completed in short periods of time.

3. Assign the person to work in locations that are devoid of distractions such as excess noise, movements, activities, etc.

4. Develop signals to alert the person to stay on task, i.e. a friendly tap on the shoulder, a wink, etc.

D. **Inability to transfer learning:**

1. Permit the person to "shadow" you as you demonstrate how a particular learning can be used in different situations.

2. Use role play in supervisory meetings to give the MSN practice in making judgments in a variety of situations.

E. **Reluctance to ask for information or for help:**

1. Require the MSN to ask one question each day. If it is difficult for the person to do it verbally, suggest that s/he begin by writing it out. If writing is hard, suggest the use of a tape recorder. Gradually require verbal direct contact.

2. Praise the person when s/he asks for information or help.

F. **Lack of initiative:**

1. Give the MSN a list of tasks that can be done without further help from the supervisor.

2. Identify situations in which you expect the MSN to take an initiative, i.e. "When you see children playing on the slide and there are no adults around, go to the slide to supervise."

3. Praise immediately when an initiative is taken.

4. Role play tasks or situations occurring on the job in which the person might take an initiative.

G. **Perseveration and impulsivity:**

1. In supervisory meetings, point out instances when the MSN has perseverated and/or been impulsive and how these behaviors get in the way of the job or are annoying to other people. Work out signals to alert the MSN when s/he is being impulsive or perseverating.

2. When these problems occur on the job, the supervisor should identify the behaviors, being careful to avoid embarrassing the MSN in front of others.

3. Suggest to the MSN that when s/he feels the urge to repeat or to interrupt that s/he should write out the comment or say it to him or herself.

4. Suggest that the MSN count to ten before speaking or acting. During that time, the MSN should assess whether what s/he wants to say has been said before and/or whether this is an appropriate time to make the comment.

5. Discuss appropriate times for talking with you and set ground rules for what issues might take priority and what issues can wait for regularly scheduled meetings.

6. In supervisory meetings, practice identifying the meaning of non-verbal and verbal cues so that the MSN can be more aware of when s/he is interrupting.

H. **Lack of social skills (shyness):**

1. Establish, as a task, that the MSN talk with one person each day. This is particularly helpful in human service settings where interaction with children or adults is crucial to functioning on the job.

2. Ask the MSN to establish a list of individuals with whom s/he could communicate each day. By choosing his or her own list, the MSN could include individuals with whom s/he would feel more comfortable.

3. Discuss ways to open a conversation. Role play conversations. Write out suggestions of conversational gambits that the MSN might use.

I. **Behaving as a service recipient rather than a service provider:**

1. Give immediate feedback when the person with moderate special needs is behaving as a service recipient, i.e. helping him/herself to refreshments before the children or clients.

2. Role play in supervisory meetings the appropriate responses for providing services.

3. Acknowledge appropriate behavior when it occurs.

4. Look for opportunities to meet the nurturing needs expressed by the person with special needs.

J. **Poor judgment in regard to safety issues:**

1. Point out possible dangerous situations at work. Spell out appropriate responses.

2. Role play what to do in an emergency.

3. Clarify the importance of good health and safety practices for all concerned including the MSN him/herself.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION OF MSNS

Findings from the research study on the supervision of people with moderate special needs in the work place indicate that the direct on site supervisor is a key ingredient for successful employment of MSNs. An important supplemental finding of the research is that the supervisor's effectiveness is significantly enhanced when s/he receives supervisory support.

This concluding section of the guidebook addresses the following interrelated aspects of supervision:

1. Qualities of the on site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the MSN.

2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on site supervisor.

1. <u>Qualities of the on site supervisor which contribute to effective job performance by the MSN.</u>

1. Personal commitment to the principle of training and hiring people with limitations for the work force.

2. Confidence in her/his own general supervisory abilities and particularly, feeling a measure of success in efforts to help the person with special needs.

3. Willingness to invest extra time, patience, and energy to understand and respond to the needs of people with moderate special needs.

4. Desire to learn techniques which will help MSN to function more effectively.

5. Readiness to be flexible about expectations and job tasks.

6. Ability to respect others for whatever their strengths or weaknesses might be.

2. Sources of supervisory consultation and suggestions for implementing support for the on site supervisor.

Respondents to the research study universally indicated the need for supervisory consultation for the on site supervisor. Several different models came to light in the study. One model is the vocational/educational model combining academic courses with practical experience exemplified by the Threshold Program. Course work is integrated with on site experiences. On site supervisors receive direction for the work of the trainee and supervisory support from the training institution.

Referrals for employment from vocational rehabilitation agencies to the work place are accompanied by a training coach who gradually phases out as the trainee is able to function more independently. This training coach may be assigned to the site to train new people, and thus is available for consultation even after the training period. Another model is that once the person is ready for employment, the training coach returns for periodic visits to the site and is available as needed.

Some companies have affirmative action officers, human resource managers, and/or personnel officers who serve in the capacity of consultants to department heads and supervisors.

Providing emotional support as well as specific information about moderate special needs to the on site supervisor are aspects of the role of the supervisory consultant which enable the on site supervisor to work more effectively with MSNs.

The following are suggestions for implementing supportive services to the on site supervisor:

1. Provide information about the characteristics of people with moderate special needs.

2. Interpret the needs which are specific to the particular trainee or employee.

3. Identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of the MSN.

4. Help the supervisor to set realistic goals based on knowledge of the MSN.

5. Give specific information about techniques which work in particular situations.

6. Set up regular meetings or phone contact with the supervisor to discuss progress and strategies for helping the MSN on the job.

7. Be available to the MSN for feedback so that you can get perspective from both sides when issues arise.

8. Establish times for observing the MSN on the job.

9. Schedule three way meetings in which there is self-evaluation from the MSN as well as feedback from you and the supervisor. (In scheduling these meetings, try to be respectful of the schedule of the supervisor).

10. Use the meetings as a way of demonstrating to the supervisor techniques of working with MSN.

11. Be available for crisis intervention.

12. Offer suggestions for changes in supervisory behavior when needed.

13. Offer emotional support: praise the supervisor for appropriate efforts as well as offering empathy for frustrations.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of qualities of the on site supervisor and the nature of supervisory consultation suggest that good intentions and positive feelings of supervisors are more effective when backed-up with specific information about the needs of MSNs and some emotional support. Does not this parallel the techniques used to help the MSN to function more effectively? People with moderate special needs function better when they are offered support and consideration in the form of flexible expectations, immediate feedback, etc. along with very specific instruction.

We know that, in general, people function better and with greater security when expectations are clearly defined and offered with a bit of TLC (tender loving care!).

Initially this may appear as a truism, but it is important to highlight in the context of designing policy and supervisory techniques for working with the moderate special needs population.

People with moderate special needs can make a contribution to the work force when properly supervised. It is heartening to find increased awareness for this long hidden and under-served population. As we grow in understanding their needs and ways to enhance their functioning, more programs of supervision could be designed. All indications are that people with moderate special needs are an untapped resource for the labor pool. They have the potential to be contributing members of society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine S. Reisman is Assistant Professor and Early Childhood Coordinator at the Threshold Program at Lesley College in Cambridge, MA. She is responsible for training young adults with moderate special needs for positions as aides in early childhood centers. Ms. Reisman holds a BA in Education from Antioch College in Ohio and an MEd from Lesley College where she majored in special education. Among her past experiences are teaching and administrative positions in regular and special education settings for young children. At the college level she has taught courses in regular and special education and supervised internships at Wheelock, Mt. Ida, and Emerson Colleges. Staff supervision, communication with parents, and discipline are among the topics on which she lectures and conducts workshops with parents and staff of early childhood centers in the USA, Israel, and Australia. Publications include related articles. Recently she completed a research study on the supervision of people with moderate special needs in the work force.